

Prime Minister John Key and his National Party were elected to a third term in general elections on September 20, 2014. Soon afterward, Key pledged to hold a national referendum in 2015 to change the New Zealand flag—a campaign promise—to better reflect the country’s unique identity while maintaining ties to the British Commonwealth.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 39 / 40 [[Key](#)]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The unicameral House of Representatives has 121 members with three-year terms. A mixed-member electoral system combines voting in geographic districts with proportional representation balloting. The prime minister, the head of government, is leader of the majority party or coalition and is appointed by the governor-general, the ceremonial head of state representing the British monarch. Jerry Mateparae, a former military chief and head of the intelligence agency, has served as governor-general since 2011. He is the second Maori to hold this post.

Prime Minister John Key led the New Zealand National Party to a third term in September 2014 general elections, winning 60 parliamentary seats. Small parties in the National-led coalition provided additional seats for Key to lead with a solid majority. The New Zealand Labor Party won just 32 seats (down from 34 in the 2011 general elections). The Green Party took just 14 seats, and New Zealand First took 11; smaller parties won the remaining 4 seats. The Internet-Mana Party launched by Kim Dotcom, a German national with permanent residency in New Zealand who is fighting against extradition to the United States for online piracy, stirred public attention, though it failed to win seats.

In 2013, the government supported a constitutional review of its “unwritten” constitution—a collection of laws and statutes rather than single written document—to examine issues including Maori representation in parliament and social, economic, and cultural rights in the 1990 Bill of Rights Act. A 12-member advisory panel produced a final report at the end of 2013. Two key recommendations were that the government should “actively support a continuing conversation about the constitution” and develop a national strategy for civics and citizenship education in schools and in the community. The government accepted the bulk of the more than 150 recommendations.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

The two main political parties are the center-left Labor Party and the center-right National Party. Smaller parties include the Maori Party, the New Zealand First Party, and the United Future Party. Seven of the parliament’s constituency seats are reserved for the native Maori population. The Maori Party, the country’s first ethnic party, was formed in 2004 to advance Maori rights and interests.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

New Zealand is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. It was ranked 2 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. However, scandals involving political donations from migrant Chinese businessmen have hurt the government's image. In May 2014, Minister Maurice Williamson resigned amid allegations of intervention in a domestic violence case involving a Chinese businessman who had made political contributions. In another case, donations were made to the National Party by a Chinese firm, one of whose board members is the husband of the Justice Minister.

Civil Liberties: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The media are free and competitive. Newspapers are published nationally and locally in English, and in other languages for the growing immigrant population. Television outlets include the state-run Television New Zealand, three private channels, and a Maori-language public network. There is also a Maori-language radio station. The government does not control or restrict internet access, and competitive pricing promotes large-scale diffusion.

Freedom of religion is protected by law and respected in practice. Only religious organizations that collect donations need to register with the government. Academic freedom prevails at all levels of instruction.

The Government Communications Security Bureau—New Zealand's main intelligence agency—reported increased surveillance of phone and electronic communications in 2014. The body received authorization in 2013 to collect data on residents and citizens, including by monitoring their communications. Surveillance was previously limited to those with no right of residency. Advocates say that surveillance helps the police, military, and intelligence community to deal with individuals like Kim Dotcom, who is charged with online piracy and money laundering. Opponents of the increased surveillance powers say the law violates individual privacy and civil rights.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The government respects freedoms of assembly and association. A number of demonstrations, including on political and economic issues, took place in 2014 without undue interference from state actors. Nongovernmental organizations are active throughout the country, and many receive considerable financial support from the government. The 2001 Employment Relations Act allows workers to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, with the exception of uniformed personnel. There are numerous trade unions and many are affiliated with the Council of Trade Unions. Union membership overall is declining, estimated at 16 percent of the labor force in 2014.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent. Prison conditions generally meet international standards. Allegations of discrimination against the Maori, who make up more than half of the prison population, persist. The police are learning to better deal with an increasingly racially and culturally diverse population and are looking to

recruit more Maori and Pacific Islanders to join the force.

Approximately 15 percent of the country's population identify themselves as Maori. Although no laws explicitly discriminate against the Maori and their living standards have generally improved, most Maori and other Pacific Islanders continue to lag behind the European-descended majority in social and economic status. The Maori population has become more assertive in its claims for land, resources, and compensation from the government, including rights to fisheries, water, and minerals.

The government generally takes steps to be considerate of indigenous cultures and ways. The 2014 Te Urewera Act recognized the Te Urewera National Park as a legal entity, in line with the views of the Tuhoe tribe. It also established a Tuhoe-chaired board tasked with the governing of the land, with four members appointed by the conservation minister and four Tuhoe-appointed members. This followed a historic 2013 agreement in which the government granted the Tuhoe greater control of Te Urewera, as well as \$170 million for financial, commercial, and cultural redress. The government had previously agreed to compensate eight tribes for grievances over land seizures and other breaches.

A more open immigration policy and an end to preferential treatment for migrants from Europe in the past two decades are fundamentally changing the face of the country. According to the 2013 census, one in four residents is foreign born; for the first time, immigrants from Asia exceed the number from Europe. In August 2014, a family from Tuvalu was granted citizenship on claims of threat from climate change if they return to their home country. This was the first successful claim for residency in New Zealand on humanitarian grounds associated with climate change.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The government respects the freedom of movement, and neither state nor nonstate actors interfere with the choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education. The country's legal and regulatory frameworks provide strong protections and mechanisms for the establishment and operation of private businesses, which are widely free from government interference.

Violence against women and children remains a problem, particularly among the Maori and Pacific Islander populations. One lawmaker in 2013 claimed Pacific Island girls as young as 13 are engaged in prostitution. Some had run away from home; others see it as an attractive way to make money. Many governmental and nongovernmental programs work to prevent domestic violence and support victims, with special programs for the Maori community.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation—including in employment—is prohibited by law, and the country has strong legislation protecting the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals. Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2013, and same-sex couples can jointly adopt children.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology